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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NGOS SHARE CONCERNS OVER JUSTICE AND PEACE LAW AND
TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS WITH WHA/AND DIRECTOR FRENCH

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On October 20, representatives from five leading human rights NGOs met with WHA/AND Director Philip French to provide their assessments of human rights conditions in Colombia. Three NGOs expressed concern over paramilitary demobilizations and the implementation of the Justice and Peace Law, while one NGO was cautiously optimistic. The NGOs also addressed Plan Colombia, the Early Warning System, and trafficking in persons issues. The meeting was cordial and positive. End Summary

NEITHER JUSTICE NOR PEACE, SAY SOME NGOS...

2. (SBU) Gloria Florez of MINGA, Iris Marin Ortiz of Comision Colombiano de Juristas, and Soraya Gutierrez of Colectivo de Abogados criticized paramilitary demobilizations and the Justice and Peace (J&P) law during an October 20 meeting with visiting WHA/AND Director Philip French. Florez accused demobilized paramilitaries of maintaining control over municipal transportation and land ownership, and claimed they exercised undue influence over elected representatives. She singled out Cucuta, Catatumbo, Putumayo, Bolivar, and Atlantico as Departments with worrisome paramilitary influence. Ortiz questioned whether the J&P law could effectively address impunity. Gutierrez expressed similar concerns, arguing that the J&P law not only disenfranchises the victims, but also that it "calls into question the very definition of democracy in Colombia."

...BUT OPINION NOT UNANIMOUS

3. (SBU) Mario Gomez of Fundacion Restrepo Barco was more supportive of the Uribe administration's implementation of the J&P law, a position he has reiterated on a number of occasions. However, Gomez said he was concerned about the AUC's cease-fire violations.

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

4. (SBU) Gomez said he supports the U.S.-funded Early Warning System for potential human rights violations, but told French that some of his NGO colleagues do not share this view. According to Gomez, some NGOs believe that civilians should not serve as informants because it would increase the risk that they could become targets themselves. French questioned this assertion, however, noting that the early warning system was a legitimate way to involve civilians in preventing massacres.

FUMIGATION

5. (SBU) Florez and Gutierrez criticized the fumigation aspect of Plan Colombia, stating the policy has caused much more harm to peasant workers and indigenous peoples than to narcotraffickers. Florez claimed that a vicious cycle exists whereby authorities spray and destroy cocoa plants, only to have new crops planted shortly thereafter. She also claimed that municipal and Departamental authorities do not agree with the national government over the costs and benefits of fumigation. Gutierrez called fumigation a failure, claiming that only 13 Departments had cocoa plantations prior to Plan Colombia fumigation in 2000, whereas 25 had them in 2005. French defended the use of glyphosate, noting its widespread use in the United States and in Latin America.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

6. (SBU) Victoria Giraldo of Fundacion Esperanza explained that while some progress is being made, daunting challenges remain in combating trafficking in persons. She said her

group is providing training to Colombian diplomatic missions in Europe to provide assistance to victims, as well as to airport officials in Colombia in spotting travelers who fit a victim profile. She also pointed out that ignorance is often to be blamed in fueling the crisis, as many Colombians do not know what a travel visa is or are too trusting of advertised foreign marriages. In addition, many of the victims are displaced persons from the armed conflict, which contributes to their vulnerabilities. Giraldo praised the Government of Japan for its increased cooperation in identifying Colombian victims, as well as the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo for facilitating their repatriation, but criticized the GOC for not doing enough to prosecute the violators.

17. (U) WHA/AND Director French cleared this message.
WOOD